City Planning Department, Los Angeles: Description & Programs

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CITY PLANNING DEPARTMENT, LOS ANGELES: DESCRIPTION AND PROGRAMS
CON HOWE, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING

(Revised June 1998)

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DESCRIPTION OF THE LOS ANGELES CITY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

The planning department staff is comprised of approximately 270 professional planners, technical personnel and clerical staff. The director and two of the three deputy directors are exempt from civil service hiring and dismissal procedures. They are subject to an examination selection process conducted by the personnel department. The mayor selects the director from among top qualifying candidates, subject to council confirmation. The director selects the deputies from among top qualifying candidates.

Department establishing and enabling authority is provided by the city charter. Administrative authority and procedures are contained in the Los Angeles Administrative Code. Legislative and judicial authority and procedures are contained in the Los Angeles Municipal Code, planning and zoning sections. Daily administrative work (preparing budget documents, coordinating training programs, processing the payroll, maintaining official files, publications and records, duplicating large quantities of documents, ordering supplies, preparing graphic materials, etc.) is the responsibility of the administrative services division (created in 1956).

Director of Planning

In 1941 the planning department became the first department of the city to be managed by a professional department head. Other departments were managed by citizen commissions. The city charter requires that the director be selected on the basis of technical and management skills. It is current city policy that the director have at least a planning and/or architectural degree and several years of management experience. Since 1941 mayors have requested a nationwide search for new directors and generally have selected directors from outside the ranks of the department. The director prepares the general plan, with the advice of the general plan advisory board; prepares proposed zoning regulations and requirements; investigates and reports on subdivision compliance; and carries out other duties assigned by the commission, mayor or city council.

Planning Commission

The commission makes recommendations to the mayor and/or city council concerning general plan, development permit and ordinance recommendations submitted to it by the director. It recommends to the mayor or city council approval, disapproval or modification of ordinances and general plan matters. Its actions on conditional use, subdivision and most other land use permits are final unless appealed to the council. Nonappealable actions are final unless brought to the council by a two-thirds vote during a regular council session and within five days of the commission action.

The commission meets two to four times a month. When it was considering new general plan elements in 1971-72 it held a record 52 regular meetings and 25 special meetings, sometimes during evening hours and on Saturday mornings. In recent decades, the commission has held meetings alternately in the downtown and at a location in the San Fernando Valley, scheduling, whenever possible, Valley cases to the Valley venue.

History. The city's first planning commission was established by charter in 1920. It was a 51-member body assigned to prepare land use plans to guide the city's growth and development. The 1925 charter created a five-member commission to manage the newly created planning department. Each member was designated to preside over a specific responsibility: official plans, zoning, public buildings and recreation, building lines and subdivisions. To distance the department from political influence, a charter amendment (1941) removed the commission from managerial authority, redefining the commission role as that of policy making and acting on recommendations submitted to it by the planning director. A 1963 charter change allowed the commission to reduce its work load by delegating responsibilities to the board of zoning adjustment.

Commission hearing examiners. A 1947 charter amendment permitted city boards to appoint hearing examiners to conduct investigations and hearings on their behalf and make recommendations to them. The planning department hearing examiner function was established by the 1947 zoning ordinance, making the department the first planning agency in the nation to utilize such a procedure. Hearing examiners are selected by the director from the professional staff but are assigned to work for the commission, under the guidance of a chief hearing examiner. The delegation of hearings enables the commission to handle a high volume of cases more efficiently, provides greater opportunity for the public to express its views at hearings and provides an opportunity for an independent evaluation of proposals recommended by the planning department relative to zoning matters, vis-a-vis suggestions and challenges raised by the public.

Office Of Zoning Administration

Zoning administrators make rulings and interpretations concerning zone code provisions and make determinations relative to zone code interpretation, zone variances, conditional uses, revocations and other land use interpretations and entitlements specified by the charter and/or zone code. The office of zoning administration is separate from and independent of the board of zoning appeals and director. *Ex parte* communication with a zoning administrator is prohibited, i.e., all communications regarding cases must be submitted in writing or at a noticed public hearing. The office is administered by the chief zoning administrator. Zoning administrators have quasi-judicial authority, i.e., their decisions are final unless appealed to the board of zoning appeals. It is responsible for related functions of the planning department, including supervision of a public counter, subdivision section and the permit counseling, environmental review and code revision units.

History. Los Angeles was the first city in the nation to establish an independent, quasi-judicial zoning office. In 1941, following a series of scandals that led to the recall of Mayor Frank L. Shaw, reforms were approved by the voters. These included charter amendments that reconstituted the planning department and created an office of zoning administration. Huber E. Smutz was appointed the first zoning administrator (1941-67), building an office that was respected for its honest professionalism.

The office was empowered to administer and enforce the zoning ordinance, make investigations and reports regarding applications for zone changes and to hear and make determinations regarding variances from the zoning ordinance, as provided by the law and the policy direction of the planning commission. The charter intended the office to be an independent, quasi-judicial office, separated from the city council and mayor and staffed by investigators, appointed from the department staff and assigned to conduct research on behalf of the zoning administrator. *Ex parte* communication with the zoning administrator was prohibited prior to issuance of a determination relative to a pending application or formal request.

The charter was amended (1947) to transfer zoning enforcement to the department of building and safety and to authorize the zoning administrator to hear and make determinations on appeals from decisions of the board of building and safety commissioners. Following a 1956 audit that called for greater independence of the office, the charter was amended (1957) to create the positions of chief and associate zoning administrator. The associates were empowered to make independent decisions, uninfluenced by the chief or director. The changes protected the quasi-judicial function of the office and enabled a sharing of the work load so as to reduce the office's case backlog.

A 1959 code amendment eliminated appearances of internal influence by making the chief administrator the sole manager of the office. The planning director could not make decisions or otherwise become involved in the work of the office. In 1966, following a year-long investigation, the county grand jury concluded that "influence can and has been in all probability will be exerted through the medium of campaign contributions, political obligations, and friendships" and recommended that the city correct its zoning practices. A councilman was jailed for illegal activities pertaining to planning and zoning matters. In response, Mayor Sam Yorty asked the council to appoint a committee to review and make recommendations regarding planning and zoning practices.

The seven member committee was chaired by former mayor Fletcher Bowron. Gordon Whitnall, the first planning director, was a member. The committee issued a series of charter, municipal code and procedural recommendations (1968-69) designed to modernize planning practices and address identified abuses. The charter was amended (1969) and the first of the zone code revisions were enacted. The amendments clearly separated the policy (general planning) from the legislative (code amendment), administrative (planning and building department regulations) and quasi-judicial (discretionary approval of exceptions from zoning regulations) functions. General plan amendment procedures were clarified.

Board Of Zoning Appeals

The appointment procedures, terms of office, etc. for the five-member board are the same as were described for the planning commission. In recent years, due to the heavy case load, the board typically has scheduled 50 meetings or more a year. Meetings generally last from three to ten hours. The board hears and acts on appeals from rulings, determinations and interpretations of the zoning administrators, including zone variance, conditional use and revocation decisions; appeals from advisory agency actions on parcel maps, private streets and other delegated subdivision matters; and appeals from the building and safety department orders, requirements or decisions where error or abuse is alleged relative to zoning regulation and enforcement. If the board does not act on appeals within the time limits specified by the municipal code, the prior determination stands. Nonappealable actions are final unless they are voted to be considered by a vote of two-thirds of the council made during a regular council meeting and within five days of the board's action. Only conditional use and use variance grants are submitted by the council to the mayor. The mayor may approve (concur) or disapprove (veto) the council's action or may choose to take no action. Taking of no action allows the council grant to stand. The council can override the mayor's veto by a two-thirds vote of its membership (10 votes).

History. Los Angeles was the first city in the nation to establish a process of appeals from quasi-judicial zoning decisions to a citizen board. In other legislative bodies and courts handled appeals. To provide an additional buffering of zoning adjustment determinations from political influence, voters approved a charter amendment (1941) creating a five-member board of zoning appeals to hear appeals from determinations of the zoning administrator. The board was reconstituted as the board of zoning adjustment (1963) to handle appeals from the zoning administrators and determinations delegated to it by the planning commission. The commission subsequently delegated authority to make building line, public land acquisition, parcel map and private street determinations. However, the very name "board of zoning adjustments" implied and the board became a means for bestowing special privileges. A 1969 charter amendment restored the name "board of zoning appeals" and redefined the board's authority as hearing appeals only. This more clearly separated it from the legislative and administrative functions of the city, reducing actual or perceived conflicts of interest.

General Plan Advisory Board

The general plan advisory board (GPAB) advises the director of planning on proposed general plan elements and amendments thereto and makes recommendations concerning proposed amendments to the city's boundaries (e.g., annexations and separations). The director is not obligated to comply with the board's recommendations.

History. The commission's first secretary, Gordon Whitnall, established the concept of a coordinating group when he convened informal sessions with heads of city agencies, including parks, recreation and engineering, to coordinate programs and actions affecting city development. His successors sporadically continued the meetings. A 1941 charter amendment established a coordinating board. It was to provide interagency coordination of specific planning and development cases and urban problems and to advise and assist the director of planning concerning master plan preparation and amendments. The board was convened and chaired by the director and was comprised of representatives of the mayor, city council and the heads of city agencies involved in city development.

In 1965 the board was reconstituted as the master plan advisory board with essentially the same membership. Its duties were changed to advising the director of planning concerning preparation of and amendment to the master plan. In 1969 it was renamed the general plan advisory board, to reflect the new approach to planning. Membership was essentially the same but a member agency had to be represented by the agency head or an executive level officer so as to assure high level policy coordination. By the 1980s city agencies routinely assisted the department in plan formulation. In addition, infrastructure and land use coordination was increasingly required by state and federal mandates and funding. This resulted in less need for a GPAB. In 1994 the planning director secured a code change that allows members to vote by proxy. Lacking a quorum the chair may conduct a meeting for discussion purposes or, may deem a quorum present, if immediate action on an item is necessary.

Subdivision Advisory Agency And Related Committees

The advisory agency is responsible for investigations and reports on design and improvement of proposed divisions of land and for imposing requirements and conditions thereon. The advisory agency has the authority to approve, conditionally approve or disapprove subdivision tract maps and to require dedication of land, the payment of fees in lieu of dedication, or both, for public improvements. The director of planning is the advisory agency for the city but may delegate the authority to one or more senior level professional staff, including, with the concurrence of the chief zoning administrator, an associate zoning administrator. The advisory agency not only acts on division of land matters but can recommend to the planning commission zone changes and zone boundary adjustments, incident to subdivision. Since 1978 the authority has been delegated primarily to an associate zoning administrator, who has the authority to issue grants of variances and other zoning determinations, thereby enabling a streamlining of permit processing. To expedite processing of a large number of cases, the advisory agency delegates certain duties to professional staff, e.g., processing of parcel maps and private streets. Determinations are appealable either to the commission (e.g., subdivisions) or the board of zoning appeals (e.g., tract maps, private streets). Subdivision and tract maps are further appealable to the council.

Historical highlights relating to subdivision matters. The 1907 state Subdivision Map Act allowed local authorities to act on local divisions of land and to secure dedications of land for streets and other public purposes. The 1911 state Improvement Act enabled them to use easements, assessment districts, eminent domain and subdivision procedures to secure streets, sewers, trails and other systems. In 1921 Map Act allowed them to require the easements.

The 1925 charter gave the planning commission authority over subdivisions. An amendment to the Map Act (1929) required all subdivision matters to be reviewed by local planning commissions, required local jurisdictions to adopt a subdivision standards ordinance and enabled local jurisdictions to require dedication of land for public improvements.

The advisory agency function was established by a 1937 Map Act amendment. It provided for the advisory agency to make investigations and reports on the design and improvements of proposed subdivisions. The planning commission was designated by the municipal code as the city's advisory agency. The code was amended (1957) to designate the director, or the director's delegated representative, as advisory agency and to allow appeals to the commission and council. The director appointed a senior level staff person to be advisory agency. A 1978 code amendment allows a zoning administrator to act as advisory agency.

In 1971 the state Quimby Act was enacted. It enables local jurisdictions to require dedication of park land or contribution of fees for acquisition and development of park lands or recreation facilities to serve the residents of proposed new subdivisions. The recreation and parks department submits recommendations concerning dedication and/or fees to the advisory agency who imposes the dedication requirements. In 1975 subdivisions were required to be consistent with a jurisdiction's adopted general plan pursuant to state Court of Appeals (*Woodland Hills Residential Association v. City of L.A.*) ruling.

Subdivision committee. The committee was established by ordinance in 1962. It is comprised of the heads of city departments involved in division of land matters, or their representatives. Members include the city engineer, superintendent of building, fire chief, and general managers of the departments of recreation and parks, general services, transportation and street lighting. The advisory agency convenes and chairs the meetings. The committee makes recommendations on all tentative tract maps, private street maps and other matters upon which the advisory agency is to make determinations. The advisory agency cannot act on a tentative map until reports concerning proposed dedications and other matters have been received from each member agency and submitted for review and comment of the subdivider.

Street design standards committee. The committee was established by ordinance in 1962. It is comprised of the director of planning, the city engineer and the general manager of the department of transportation. The director serves as chair and convenes the meetings, as deemed needed. The committee recommends to the planning commission minimum street width and improvement standards for streets and alleys. There is no appeal from the commission action which takes place following a noticed public hearing.

CURRENT PROGRAMS: LOS ANGELES CITY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

General Plan

The general plan is the city's adopted policy guide for development decisions and activities. The key document that guides the entire plan is the Framework element. It was adopted in 1996, replacing the 1974 50-year Concept and 20-year Citywide plans. Framework provides guidelines for long range planning and development to the year 2010. It reinforces the Concept policies of high density centers and corridors interspersed by low and medium density neighborhoods, linked by multi-modal public transit systems. It refines the boundaries of the high density areas and corridors and defines regional centers, community centers and neighborhood districts. It proposes mixed use within mid- and high-density centers and along designated boulevards; provides development and design guidelines for the centers, districts, boulevards and other types of areas; outlines implementation programs; and proposes strategies for economic, housing and multi-modal transportation. Multi-modal systems include bus, shuttle bus, dial-a-ride, fixed rail and other transportation systems.

General plan elements. Framework lists the elements of the general plan. They include a land use element (the 35 community plans) and ten specialized elements (air quality, noise, housing, urban form and neighborhood design, safety, public facilities and services, infrastructure systems, open space and conservation, historic preservation and cultural resources, and transportation). The urban form and neighborhood design element is new. The others are revisions of adopted elements. The land use, circulation, housing, open space and conservation, noise, and safety (which addresses natural hazards, e.g., floods and seismic events, not police matters) are mandated by the state general plan law.

Growth monitoring program. The growth monitoring program is designed to help the city assess the impact of plan-designated and actual growth on the city's infrastructure. It provides a primary data source for assessing Framework and general plan element implementation and for assessing the city's progress in meeting air quality and other mandates. It complements the city's traditional capital improvement program by providing current and projected information regarding the status of the city's infrastructure vis-a-vis general plan policies, demographic information and growth projections. Reports issued in conjunction with this program are to assist planners and decision makers in the coordination, phasing and prioritizing land development and infrastructure expansion and upgrading. All agencies of the city are participating in the program, as well as non-city agencies, e.g., the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Los Angeles Unified School District, Southern California Association of Governments. The reports are updated and submitted annually to the mayor, city council, planning commission and participating agencies. They include population, housing, employment, infrastructure and other forecasts and data. The first Annual Report on Growth and Infrastructure was released in 1996 for 1990-94.

Community plans/zoning consistency. The boundaries of the city are irregular. They completely surround or partially encircle the independent cities of Beverly Hills, San Fernando, West Hollywood, Inglewood, Santa Monica and Culver City, as well as county, state and federal lands. The city covers such a vast territory that many residents do not consider themselves "Los Angelenos" but, instead, identify with one of the many separate communities that comprise the city. These communities, such as the world famous Hollywood, do not have specific boundaries or separate governments but have historic, cultural and geographic identity.

For planning purposes the city is divided into 35 geographic "community plan" areas, the boundaries of which generally are based on statistical data collection boundaries, e.g., census tracts. Community plans implement and contribute to the citywide general plan elements, especially Framework, providing generalized land use designations, locations of streets and public facilities, community development policies, urban design guidelines and implementation programs. They are prepared with the help of technical staff from other agencies and council-appointed citizen advisory committees.

The state requirement (Thomas Act 1977) that land use plans and zoning be consistent increased the legal authority of the land use element of the general plan and significantly changed the way the city's plans are prepared and zone changes are processed. A land use map no longer is a mere guide. Zoning of a parcel must be consistent with the adopted plan. A land use map may indicate intensity of use that is greater than the existing zone, but the zoning may not allow a more intensive use than is allowed by an adopted plan. Requested changes of zone that are inconsistent with an adopted community plan must be accompanied by a plan amendment request. The action on the zone change must be consistent with the adopted plan or the plan must be amended. To protect plans from constant revision and potential spot zoning, state law limits general plan amendments to four amendments a year. However, it allows applications to be considered as a group ("batched") so the cumulative effect on the general plan can be examined.

Other consistency considerations. Consistency requirements have given greater importance to general planning. State law requires that subdivisions and other planning actions be consistent with or not harm the general plan. Federal clean water and clean air mandates require that local jurisdictions and the region as a whole better manage and coordinate growth so as to reduce existing and potential air and water pollution. Federal and state funding for transportation, housing and other programs are increasingly requiring that programs be identified in general plans and that local plans be consistent with regional, state and federal plans. Regional air quality and transportation plans are two of the most critical plans within the region. Air quality is directly affected by transportation both by the systems themselves and by the way the systems enable and direct growth. Jurisdictions and agencies within the region work together as members of the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) to prepare regional plans that meet federal standards and funding requirements.

General Plan Implementation

Geographically specific plans. Specific plans are zoning ordinances that are prepared by the department, usually with the assistance of advisory committees or the land developer. They implement community plans by providing regulatory controls and incentives to guide development and change within the geographically specific area. They vary in accordance with the individual needs, issues and problems associated with the area. Adopted specific plans include plans for large new urban centers (Warner Center and Century City), historic preservation (North University Park), staged growth of existing community centers (Westwood), circulation management (Ventura Boulevard) and scenic preservation and enhancement (Mulholland Drive Scenic Parkway). Specific plans usually restrict uses within zones, phase development, provide design standards and contain implementation incentives.

Overlay and supplemental zones. In addition to the zoning and height districts that determine use and development limitations for each parcel of land in the city, overlay and supplemental classifications further define and regulate the activities that may take place on a parcel.

Overlay zones are established by ordinance. Generally they are imposed to protect uses within a geographic area or to regulate new development so as to protect specific features of an area. Overlay zones that apply to the city include historic preservation overlay zones (to protect and enhance significant and important cultural and historic sites and structures), flood hazard zone (to regulate development and redevelopment within areas subject to flooding or inundation from water bodies, e.g. ocean waves), ocean-submerged land zone (to regulate industrial and commercial activities off-shore so as to protect the marine ecology) and coastal zone (city development permits regulate development within the state-defined coastal zone area so as to minimize impacts and to assure public access to beaches, in accordance with the California Coastal Act).

Supplemental use districts are adopted by ordinance. The ordinance delineates the boundaries of the district and special provisions that apply to it. Generally they are applied to protect features within the district or to establish additional development rights, special procedures and controls that allow types of activities to operate in a manner that will have minimal impact on adjacent uses. Supplemental use districts include: oil drilling districts (to regulate drilling operations), surface mining districts (to regulate rock, sand and gravel extraction operations), equinekeeping districts (to encourage retention of horse keeping uses), commercial and artcraft districts (to encourage creation of enclaves for artists to live, create and market their work) and pedestrian oriented districts (to enhance pedestrian activities within commercial areas). Each of these zones and districts is regulated by provisions set forth in the zone code and, in some cases, by additional conditions imposed as a part of the establishing ordinance or permitting action.

Code revision. The planning and zoning code is amended several times a year to incorporate new state mandates, add provisions to address specific issues of concern, add general plan implementation provisions and to otherwise to keep the code current. The code studies unit of the department is responsible for researching and preparing planning and zoning code amendments, as well as related amendments to other sections of the city's codes.

Private development. Implementation of city plans occurs largely through private development or redevelopment of properties, public infrastructure improvements and public or public-private redevelopment and revitalization projects.

Permit Processing

Much of the department's staff are engaged in permit processing functions. Public counters located in the San Fernando Valley and central city take in applications and collect fees for application processing. Other staff evaluate applications and environmental documents and submit their comments to decision makers or issue determinations. Permit applications may be approved, disapproved or, in some cases, conditionally approved. After applications are approved, staff review development plans to ensure that they fulfill permit requirements.

The planning department has an array of procedures and requirements that must be met. Other agencies also have code requirements and procedures that must be met, including building and fire safety requirements and provision of street and other public improvements. Even to the seasoned developer, the maze of governmental requirements can be daunting.

In 1993 Mayor Richard Riordan requested that city agencies work together to simplify the permit process. The planning department, in addition to devising ways to shorten and simplify permitting procedures, expanded its permit counseling services, creating an entitlement management office. The office counsels applicants concerning the type of permits and paperwork needed, applicable processing procedures and how to fulfil conditions of permit approvals. The office helps to expedite permit processing by arranging, if procedurally feasible, joint hearings where multiple permits are involved and by coordinating processing with other permitting agencies. The office does not prepare applications or materials for the applicants. It does not become involved in determining the outcome of the application. Its role is strictly to provide

counseling and assistance relative to procedural matters. Also at the request of Mayor Riordan, all city departments have placed commission agendas and other information on the city's WEB page of the Internet.

Environmental review. In 1972 the California State Supreme Court (*Friends of Mammoth v. Mono County*) ruled that the 1970 California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) applies to private development projects. That made CEQA applicable to every discretionary action of government relating to land development or change. Pursuant to CEQA, projects must identify potential environmental impacts of the project and feasible mitigation measures. Minor projects may be deemed exempt from such provisions. Significant projects must prepare environmental impact reports (EIR) or mitigated negative declarations (MND) that identify impacts and mitigation measures. The measures are imposed as conditions of project or permit approval. Every permit processor reviews and evaluates environmental impact information associated with applications they are processing. A site plan review unit processes environmental documents associated with otherwise "by-right" building permits for projects that exceed specific thresholds of development, as defined by the municipal code.

Case tracking. Since the late 1980s, the department has worked with other city permit agencies to log the status of planning permit applications in a central, automated (computer) system that enables officials to determine the progress of an application. Copies of planning department case files are retained in the department's central files section for several years, to enable ready access when a project is ready for implementation. Eventually, the files are transferred to the city's archives, which are maintained by the city clerk.

Data Systems and Mapping

There are a variety of land and planning data systems that are maintained by city and county agencies and under joint agreements. One of the most used of the data bases is the LUPAMS (land use planning and mapping system), which was jointly established by the city and county in the 1960s. It provides computer accessible data concerning zoning, land use, parcel size, ownership and other data for all parcels of land within the county. Other heavily used sources are building permit, traffic, street and parcel information provided by the building and safety department, department of transportation and the engineering bureau. In addition, the department has and is developing automated data bases. The most significant of these are the GIS and demographic projects.

Geographic information system (GIS). Computers have been used as planning tools by the department for land records and demographic analysis since the late 1950s. Computers were used increasingly as the technology became more viable for office use and equipment became less costly. Until the 1980s the department used the city's mainframe computer. This assured data conformity but limited quick access to and manipulation of data files. The advent of the micro chip and personal computers revolutionized data collection and processing in the mid-1980s. With the introduction of personal computers, the department was able to develop its own data systems.

In 1986, to facilitate case tracking, data gathering, data retrieval and map amendment and reproduction for the general plan-zoning consistency program, the department began developing an automated geographic information system. Its GIS contained general plan land use, zoning and case processing information needed by the consistency program and for creation of general plan maps that could be readily updated and reproduced.

GIS zone map automation project. As personal computers proliferated, data systems were developed independently to address specific user-oriented needs. Consequently the data files often were incompatible, making them inaccessible for automated use by other agencies. In the mid-1990s, city, county and regional agencies began working cooperatively to develop data compatibility standards to enable information to be transferred and integrated for use by different agencies and the public. As the

consistency program neared completion, the engineering bureau's data base for all of the city's more than 980,000 parcels became available. Planning staff, utilizing engineering base maps, completed a pilot program in 1997 in which they manually or through transference, combined planning and development data with the engineering data base. Northridge was selected as the pilot area. Automated data and maps included zoning, case processing and ordinance numbers, grading and hillside area boundaries, building lines and other information contained on the city's official district zoning maps (previously hand prepared), as well as soils, geology, environmental and general plan land use classifications. Other spatially definable data deemed useful for development permit processing and planning will be added over time. The data will be made accessible by address, parcel, block, community plan area and other means. Data not available on city files was secured from a variety of governmental and private data base sources.

The success of the pilot project prompted the city council and mayor to authorize funding of a massive project to automate the city's 1,888 official district (cadastral) zoning maps. The four-year program began in 1998 to create a GIS planning data base for the entire city, similar to that of the pilot project. It is being carried out by several consultants, under the direction of the planning department. Upon completion the data will be available to agencies within the city. As computer technology improves, the goal is to make much of the data available on the Internet. Concurrently, the planning department is working with city agencies to develop methods for accessing and interfacing existing data systems.

Special GIS-related projects. As in the past, the mayor, city council and other agencies (especially redevelopment, housing and federally funded agencies) request data to help make decisions, identify potential funding projects, document community needs, justify federal and state funding and carry out redevelopment, improvement and enforcement projects. Staff often must create new data bases to respond to particular requests. This may require manual digitization of the spatial area involved, or entering tabular attribute data into the GIS. If data exists in a non-GIS, but digital automated format, it must be translated and introduced into the system before it can be utilized. As in prior times, the data search can involve considerable research to locate data sources. Once found or created the data or data source information is added to the GIS. The emergence of GIS within both the public and private sectors has created a wealth of automated data, some of which is readily useable by the department's GIS. Acquiring such information either through purchase or mutual data sharing agreements has proven to be a considerably quicker and more cost efficient method than the old hand-collected field-check approach.

Demographics. The demographics section compiles and analyzes statistical information concerning characteristics of the population, city demographics and social and economic information. The information is used by the department and other agencies to assess current and future planning, budgeting and infrastructure considerations. Demographic information is being entered into the GIS. As with GIS, the demographic staff conducts special studies at the request of the mayor, city council and other agencies.

Graphics. The department prepares its own graphics, as well as graphics requested from time to time by the mayor, city council and other agencies. Within the past decade work of the unit has shifted from hand prepared art work and model making to use of computer graphics. However, graphic artists still prepare hand drawn graphics and mock-up work.

Coordination With Other Agencies And Groups

In addition to the various agencies within the city with which the department coordinates though a variety of committees and daily activities, the department works with numerous county, regional, state, federal and quasi-public agencies, as well as with citizen groups. Among these are the following:

Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). SCAG superseded the Regional Planning Association (established 1923), which was considered the second, after New York, regional planning body in the nation. The Association promoted intergovernmental cooperation and citizen participation in planning within the county and region for more than three decades. In the 1960s, after the state allowed formation

of regional councils of governments, Los Angeles was one of the leaders in forming the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) to prepare and coordinate regional planning. Councilman and future mayor Tom Bradley, who had been instrumental in establishing SCAG, was elected its first president in 1968.

SCAG is comprised of six member counties and approximately 184 member cities, encompassing a land area of 38,000 square miles and containing a population of 15.6 million people. SCAG works with the region's decision makers and sub-regional agencies to develop coordinated long range policies and plans that address regional concerns and help local agencies meet federal and state mandates. It serves as a conduit for information exchange relative to growth management, institutional, environmental, infrastructure and mobility problems and opportunities. The Los Angeles mayor and all 15 city council members are voting members of the SCAG regional council. Los Angeles is one of the 14 subregions within the SCAG organization. The planning department and other city staffs provide and receive technical assistance from SCAG and are active in the SCAG planning process. Federal funds have been allocated through SCAG for city planning studies and plan preparation.

Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). The MTA is a state established agency that is responsible for planning, implementing and operating a multi-modal transportation system within the county, including buses, a subway and light rail systems. The planning department has received funding from the MTA to prepare plans for neighborhoods around the MTA rail transit stops and coordinates transportation planning with MTA and other transit agencies.

Los Angeles County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo). LAFCo is a state established commission that acts on boundary matters within the county, including annexations, detachments and boundary adjustments. To assist the City's decision making, the planning department prepares data about city-related areas under consideration, evaluating the pros and cons of proposals. Detachment procedures were changed in 1997 to allow local areas to place secession measures on the ballot by initiative.

Citizen committees. Citizen participation is essential to the city's planning program. Not only do people get a chance to comment on planning matters as a part of the public hearing process, but many of the projects assigned to the department are accomplished with the assistance of citizens through workshops, focus groups, advisory committees and other means. Since the mid-1960s advisory committees have been appointed, usually by council members, to assist the department in preparing community plans. Sometimes citizen and/or technical advisory committees are formed to assist in the preparation of other elements of the general plan, specific plan, amendments to the code and special studies. In addition, citizens help oversee and implement specific plans and historic preservation overlay zones. Specific plan ordinances and the Municipal Code provide for citizens to serve on design review boards which review development projects to assure they are consistent with the specific plans. The Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) requires appointment of a property owner-resident board to oversee implementation consistent with the objectives of the particular HPOZ.

[This paper was researched and prepared by Anne V. Howell of the Los Angeles Department of City Planning, on her own time as a volunteer project for the department, 1997-98.]

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